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### Islam and the struggle over political legitimacy in Egypt: The 1987 elections through the lenses of *al-Liwa' al-Islami* and *Liwa' al-Islam*

Kiki Santing

**Abstract:** The 1987 parliamentary elections in Egypt, held at a time of Islamization and relative political liberalization, resulted in a significant number of seats for the *Muslim Brotherhood*. Consequently, the political cards were shuffled and the regime and the *Brotherhood* became involved in a struggle over legitimacy, in which Islam played a central part. Through qualitative content analysis, this paper studies how, in the context of the 1987 elections, Islam was instrumentalized in the struggle over political legitimacy in the governmental journal *al-Liwa' al-Islami* and its regime-critical counterpart *Liwa' al-Islam*, the latter of which was launched ten days after the first session of Parliament was held. Although the two journals performed different roles, there were many similarities in how both viewed political Islam. I argue that these shared Islamic values functioned as an instrument to connect people and added to the legitimacy of both the regime and the *Brotherhood*.

**Keywords:** Muslim Brotherhood, Mubarak, Egypt, legitimacy, political Islam

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## Introduction

During the early years of Hosni Mubarak's presidency the *Muslim Brotherhood* challenged the regime's hegemony and became an active political player in Egyptian politics. As a result, the regime and the *Brotherhood* became involved in a struggle over authority and, consequently, legitimacy. This paper contextualizes contemporary debates on political legitimacy and the use of Islam therein through a historical case study of two seemingly different media outlets: the governmental newspaper *al-Liwa' al-Islami* (The Islamic Banner, henceforth *ALAI*) and the Muslim Brotherhood journal *Liwa' al-Islam* (The Banner of Islam, hereafter *LAI*) at the time of the 1987 parliamentary elections. That year, the *Brotherhood* won a significant number of seats for the first time and, thus, formally engaged in national politics. Consequently, both the regime and the *Brotherhood* reflected on this new political situation in their journals.

Through qualitative content analysis, I look at how Islam was instrumentalized in the struggle over political legitimacy in the governmental *ALAI* and its regime-critical counterpart *LAI* in the context of the 1987 elections. This case study contributes to academic debates on political legitimacy, and more specifically on Islamism as a political ideology and a strategy therein, providing insights into how both the regime and the *Brotherhood* strove for legitimacy and legitimized political participation within an Islamic framework. Both sought political power, but with different aims and from different starting points, both claimed to represent the Islamic current, and both used their journals as part of their political strategies.

## Theory: Islamism and the struggle over legitimacy

Authority is closely connected with legitimacy. Weber (1947) states that 'the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a *belief*, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige' (p. 382). For an entity to have political authority, it can, thus, be argued that it needs to have political legitimacy (Buchanan, 2002, p. 691). An institution, like a ruling party or a government, is legitimate, in the sociological sense, 'when it is widely *believed* to have the right to rule' (Buchanan and Keohane, 2006, p. 405). Political legitimacy, in this sense, means that 'institutional agents are morally justified in making rules and attempting to secure compliance with them and that people subject to those rules have moral, content-independent reasons to follow them and/or to not interfere with others' compliance with them' (Buchanan and Keohane, 2006, p. 411).

Influential thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant mention the social contract in relation to political legitimacy, indicating peoples' consent to surrender some of their freedoms to an authority in exchange for social order and protection of their rights (Friend). According to Hobbes (2004), the social contract helps

people establish a political community and prevents them from being in their anarchic state of nature. Locke (2015) adds that a government's legitimacy is connected to its function of being a neutral judge that safeguards whoever has submitted to its authority. Legitimacy of political authority, according to Locke (2015), is connected to individuals' consent. Rousseau (2003) argues, among other things, that legitimacy constitutes an obligation to obey to the system that decides what is good for all. According to Kant, moreover, political authority is only legitimate if the social contract is respected by the ruler (Reiss, 1991).

In the Middle East, the legitimacy of political authority of secular, mostly authoritarian leaders was increasingly challenged by proponents of political Islam, often referred to as 'neofundamentalists' (Ayubi, 1991; Esposito, 1991, p. 129; Roy, 1994), for instance in Algeria, Egypt and Iran, in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Roy (1994), 'activists groups' like the *Muslim Brotherhood*, 'see in Islam as much a political ideology as a religion' (p. vii).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he believes that Islamism ultimately failed in offering a model for a different society or brighter future, because eventually it only produced superficial changes without inventing new political forms (1994, p. ix). Studying the role of Islam in obtaining political legitimacy contributes to debates on different interpretations, or intentions of Islamism. Was this, for one, part of a gradualist approach, which is often attributed to the *Brotherhood* (Rosefsky-Wickham, 2002; Anani, 2016), in which state bodies are gradually taken over with the eventual aim of taking full control and abolishing democracy (Hamid and McCants, 2017, p. 4)? Or might this gradual approach be a way to, ultimately, provide a free environment in which Muslims can develop their own vision of an Islamic society and debate how to accommodate Islam in its governing structures (Khan, 2006, pp. 143-144)?

The struggle for power and the new political reality of 1987, which is explained further below, required an explanation on how and why Islam and politics were compatible, and this is where the *Muslim Brotherhood's* journal *LAI* comes in. Nevertheless, the *Brotherhood* was not unique in its bid for leadership of the Islamist current in Egypt, as the regime also claimed this position and explained its views on the compatibility of Islam and politics in *ALAI*. Given that two seemingly different groups that fought for legitimacy, the regime and the *Brotherhood*, nevertheless have ideological similarities regarding their views on political Islam, this paper also shows how they represent different sides in this broad spectrum of Islamism.

## Contextualizing the 1987 elections

While the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalized the media in the 1960s, primarily using it as a political tool, his successor Anwar Sadat started a political liberalization process that also included the media. Supported by Sadat,

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<sup>1</sup> Even though Ayubi (1991) mentions that arguing that Islam itself is by its very nature political is a proposition that needs to be refuted (pp. 1-26).

the 1970s were a time of revival and growth for the (still formally illegal) *Muslim Brotherhood*. In 1976 publishing political papers became legal and that same year the *Brotherhood* journal *al-Da'wa* (The Call) came out. After 1977, the year of the infamous bread riots and Sadat's visit to Israel, the president tightened press regulations to stifle opposition and *al-Da'wa* was banned in September 1981. Sadat's successor Husni Mubarak initially maintained tight media control, but gradually loosened it in the mid-1980s and, allegedly, 'opposition presses enjoyed a liberty uncommon in the Arab world' (Davidson, 2000, p. 79). Consequently, in 1987 the *Brotherhood* was allowed to publish *LAI*. Criticism of Mubarak was, purportedly, prohibited, but 'non-governmental papers incited political debates' and by the 1990s several independent publications had appeared (Chiba, 2010, p. 10).<sup>2</sup>

Muslim societies changed drastically in the 1970s. This was, among other things, related to the fact that the first generation of what Kepel calls the 'demographic explosion and the rural exodus,' who had never known direct colonial domination and were predominantly literate, became adults (2003, p. 11). Their disarray became an important factor in the crisis of secular ideologies, leading them towards faith (Kepel 2003, pp. 11–13). The religious upsurge was witnessed all throughout the Middle East (and, arguably, the world at large), resulting in, among other things, the Iranian Revolution, Islamic Awakening (*Sahwa*) in Saudi Arabia and Erbakan's Islamic movement in Turkey, up to Messianic Zionism in Israel (Rock-Singer, 2019, pp. 1–2), as well as the rise of the *Brotherhood* in Egypt. Under Mubarak, the *Brotherhood* expanded its presence in various spheres of public and political life (Rosefsky-Wickham, 2015, p. 46).

The relationship between the regime and the *Brotherhood* had been difficult since the movement's establishment in 1928. Nasser banned the *Brotherhood* in 1954, putting it through a time of self-proclaimed *mihna* ('ordeal') (Zollner, 2007, pp. 412–413; Zollner, 2009, p. 37). Under Sadat it was allowed a return to the semi-legal sphere, but nevertheless remained illegal, without formal political representation.<sup>3</sup> When Mubarak came to power in 1981, the *Brotherhood* had developed into a large, politically ambitious movement.

The 1984 parliamentary elections were the first since 1952 in which a multiparty opposition was allowed to campaign, even though only five groups officially contested. Prior to the elections, the Electoral Law was changed to a multiparty system, not allowing independent candidates to run. The law furthermore set a high threshold of eight percent (Ibrahim, 1988, p. 646). An aspiring party would only be eligible for application if it was able to secure a minimum of twenty seats (al-Awadi, 2004, p. 82) and ballots for parties that fell short of the required eight percent were automatically transferred to the largest party: Mubarak's *National Democratic Party* (NDP). Moreover, the law only granted recognized parties the right

<sup>2</sup> Not all Egyptians had access to print media in 1987, however. In 1986, 44.4% of all adults ages 15 and above were literate, rising to 55.6% in 1996 (World Bank, UNESCO).

<sup>3</sup> It was legalized in 2011 and declared illegal again after Mohammed Morsi's ousting in 2013.

of political participation, so the illegal *Brotherhood* cooperated with the *New Wafd Party*. Eventually, this was the only block that passed the threshold, obtaining a modest number of seats.<sup>4</sup> While unable to form a serious threat to the *NDP*, the results nevertheless surprised Mubarak, who kept a closer eye on the *Brotherhood* from then on (Blaydes, 2011, p. 69).

In 1986, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled the Election Law unconstitutional for banning independent candidates and demanded that Parliament should be dissolved and new elections scheduled. Mubarak superseded the ruling and amended the law in December, after which independent candidates were allowed to run for seats and votes under the eight percent threshold were shared in proportion to the number of votes each party had received (al-Awadi 2004, pp. 112–113).<sup>5</sup>

On 12 February 1987 a referendum was held to decide whether Parliament should be dissolved. Almost 90 percent voted in favor and elections were scheduled for April (Dean, 2004, p. 303). Two days later, the *Brotherhood*, the *Labor Party* and the *Liberal Party* formalized their new partnership. The *Brotherhood* was not allowed to form its own party, because it was based on religious principles (in addition to being illegal) and used the alliance to participate. *Labor* and the *Liberals*, moreover, were interested in the *Brotherhood*'s large grassroots base (Korany, 2006, p. 88). This alliance became known as the *Islamic Alliance* and it was agreed that the slate would be divided with 40 percent for the *Brotherhood*, 40 percent for *Labor* and 20 percent for the *Liberals* (el-Ghobashy, 2005, p. 379).

In the run-up to the elections, parties could be seen pushing their Islamic credentials. The *Brotherhood* set up a large campaign, mainly targeting 'the average voter's strong attachment to the Islamic message.' This triggered a response from the regime, which threatened to remove all *Brotherhood* banners, arguing that it was formally illegal (Makram-Ebeid, 1989, pp. 433–434). Subsequently, hundreds of Brothers and supporters were arrested in the days prior to the elections (el-Ghobashy, 2005, p. 379).

The elections were held on 6 April, followed by a second round for nine seats on 13 April. The *NDP* won 300 out of 448 seats in total, which was the lowest for a ruling party since 1952 (al-Awadi, 2004, p. 113).<sup>6</sup> The *Islamic Alliance* secured seventeen percent of votes, resulting in 56 seats, 36 of which went to *Muslim Brothers*. 48 Seats were reserved for independent candidates, three of which went to *Brother-*

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4 There is little consensus on the number of seats Brotherhood representatives obtained. According to Ibrahim (1988), the alliance obtained 65 seats, out of 458 in total, with seven for the Brotherhood (p. 646). El-Ghobashy (2005, p. 378) and al-Awadi (2004, p. 81) mention 58 seats altogether, with eight for the Brotherhood and Brownlee believes that Brotherhood candidates obtained six seats (2010, p. 424).

5 The amended law was declared unconstitutional again in 1990, after which Parliament was dissolved again (Bernard-Maugiron, 2008, p. 412; Banks and Muller, 1998, p. 279).

6 The exact voter turnout is not clear. Official figures mentioned 54 percent, but Springborg argues that these were exaggerations (1989, pp. 162–163). The actual turnout was likely between 25–30% (Makram-Ebeid, 1989, p. 432).



hood independents, leaving the movement with almost 40 seats (Makram-Ebeid, 1989, p. 432; el-Ghobashy, 2005, p. 379). On 22 April the first session of Parliament was held and on 1 May *LAI* appeared for the first time.

Altogether, 1987 was a crucial year in the struggle over political legitimacy and the development of a vision on political Islam by both the regime and the *Brotherhood*. The elections were, first of all, held at a time of Islamization and relative political liberalization at the same time. The *Brotherhood* immediately jumped on this development once it was given the opportunity. It had long-since strived for political representation and in 1987 this aspiration seemed to be (on its way to be) achieved. The regime (and others alike), however, also wanted to depict itself as epitomizing the Islamic current, while simultaneously preserving its political hegemony. Consequently, the regime increasingly came to view the *Brotherhood* as a serious opponent that had to be contained. Both strove for power: the regime wished to preserve its political position, whereas the *Brotherhood* wanted to safeguard and expand what it had recently achieved, and Islam functioned as a strong rhetoric tool in this battle for legitimacy.

### Methodology: Approaching the journals

While both the regime and the *Muslim Brotherhood* competed for political legitimacy in the 1987 elections and beyond, they each used their main (Islamic) journals to prove their religious and moral credentials. Therefore, it is only consequential to study *ALAI* and *LAI*, representing these two opposing political strands.

As mentioned above, Egypt's media experienced phases of liberation followed by strict regulation. Whereas President Sadat initially encouraged the liberalization of the media, he banned all non-governmental press before his assassination in October 1981. Several months later the new government, headed by Mubarak, launched the Islamic weekly *ALAI*. Starting off as a supplement to the governmental *Mayu*, it was launched as an independent newspaper on 28 January 1982. In April 1987, *ALAI* itself mentions that it sold more than 300,000 issues per week (*ALAI* 274, p. 1). Esposito and Piscatori (1991) talk of 750,000 copies (p. 429), Freijsen of 700,000 (1991, p. 8) and Kupferschmidt mentions that it sold far more copies than the *Brotherhood's* *LAI* (2008, p. 182). Its appeal is explained, among other things, by the idiom of the newspaper, which was rather simple and, thus, accessible to those who were passably literate.<sup>7</sup>

Islamic media were generally on the rise under Mubarak. 'Dozens of Islamic newspapers, weeklies, and monthlies had high circulation rates' and religious television programs increased by 50 percent between 1975 and 1990 (Bayat, 1998, pp. 84–86). According to Starrett, moreover, religious periodicals from the public sector

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<sup>7</sup> By way of illustration, in 1985 al-Akhbar had a circulation of 650,000, al-Ahram 550,000, and al-Gumhuriyya 400,000 (Rugh, 2004, p. 123). Nevertheless, circulation numbers should be approached critically as they do not necessarily say much about actual readership.

‘rank third in terms of total annual circulation, after journals in the social sciences and arts. But in terms of average circulation per title per issue, religious periodicals are in first place’ (1995, p. 55). Regarding the tone, Rosefsky-Wickham believes that ‘printed media tended to promote a socially conservative version of Islam’ (2002, p. 135).

Esposito and Pescatori argue that by publishing his own Islamic newspaper, Mubarak, who understood and acknowledged the deep Islamic sentiments in Egypt, attempted to enhance his own Islamic credentials (1991, p. 429). Ismail (1999) agrees and mentions that the state ‘made use of cultural production and the media in its battle with Islamist groups over the terms of religious orthodoxy and public morality.’ Allegedly, regime-sponsored religious media were stimulated in order to ‘discredit the radical Islamists’ (p. 33). Although the *Brotherhood* was often accused of radicalism, these accusations also referred to other groups like the *Jama‘at Islamiyya*, which were more openly violent.<sup>8</sup>

The *Brotherhood*’s main journal under Sadat, *al-Da‘wa*, was shut down in September 1981. In May 1987, the movement was again allowed to publish its own journal and *LAI* was launched, which came out every Islamic month and was generally about 66 pages long. Printed for the first time in 1947 by Ahmad Hamza, it had no clear connection to the *Brotherhood* until 1987 (Freijsen, 1991, p. 9).<sup>9</sup> When it first came out in 1987, pictures of ‘Umar al-Tilmisani and Mustafa Mashhur, two *Brotherhood* chairmen, appeared on the cover (*LAI* 1, p. 9) and references to the movement were made constantly. The ‘responsible publisher’ was Fatima Ahmad Hamza and the editor Jabir Rizq.<sup>10</sup> After Rizq’s death, in July 1988, the editorship was taken over by Badr Mohammed Badr (*LAI* 43, p. 3).

According to Rosefsky-Wickham, the journal’s circulation grew from 35,000 in 1987 to about 95,000 in 1991, with about half of all the issues sold outside of Egypt, earning most of its profits from these international sales (2002, pp. 101–102). A copy in Egypt cost 40 piasters. Official subscription was (quite probable for security reasons; *Brotherhood* members and sympathizers would not have wanted their names centrally listed) only possible outside of Egypt. *LAI* strongly resembled *al-Da‘wa*, but it had a more explicit political undertone, directly addressing the president and focusing on political issues, which now seemed appropriate, since the *Brotherhood* was formally represented in Parliament (Santing, 2020). In September 1988, it even incorporated *al-Da‘wa*’s slogan (also known from other previous *Brotherhood* publications): ‘the voice of truth, power and freedom.’

<sup>8</sup> Often lumped together by authorities, the *Brotherhood* and the *Jama‘at Islamiyya* were different groups. Known for their confrontational strategies, the *Jama‘at* emerged from the student movement under Sadat (Kepel, 2003, pp. 129–130) and ‘maintained a principal boycott of all official political activity,’ because the regime was not considered Muslim and, thus, had to be resisted (Stein, 2011, pp. 867–868).

<sup>9</sup> Hamza is mentioned in the editorial details as the ‘deceased founder.’

<sup>10</sup> A *Brotherhood* journalist who had also supervised the daily functions of *al-Da‘wa* (Al-Arian, 2014, p. 183).



As for the content, the journals shared many similarities. Both dealt, among other things, with religious, political and moral issues in Egypt and the (Islamic) world at large. *ALAI* generally emphasized religious and moral issues whereas *LAI* was openly critical of the regime from the onset. This critical stance also shows from the journal's title, which provocatively referred to its governmental counterpart. *ALAI*, on the other hand, also expressed criticism of the *Brotherhood*, albeit more cautiously.

I carried out a qualitative content analysis to understand the discourses used in these mouthpieces to compete for legitimacy. First, I set a time frame around the 1987 elections that varies for the two journals. Since *LAI* first came out after the April 1987 elections, its first months are taken into account (May–August), when the outcomes of the elections were freshly imprinted in the *Brothers'* minds. For *ALAI* I chose a slightly longer time frame. In the weeks and months after the elections, political issues were not of much concern. When looking at the run-up to the elections, however, it becomes evident that it did have a political side, which emerged prior to political events. Therefore, *ALAI* is studied from January 1987, a few weeks before a referendum was held to decide whether Parliament should be dissolved, until July, several months after the elections. Subsequently, I read the editions qualitatively, looking for articles that dealt with political issues such as the president, the *NDP*, elections, electoral law(s), referendum(s), democracy, shura, shari'a and political (opposition) parties. All articles that either criticized or praised the regime or the *Brotherhood* (including the *Islamic Alliance*) were also included, in addition to all articles that discussed the relation between Islam and politics.

### ***Al-Liwa' al-Islami* and the 1987 elections**

The weekly *ALAI* had generally about 24 pages. 'Abdallah 'Abd al-Bari was chairman and Ahmad Zayn editor-in-chief. Both held this position in 1982 and continued to do so in 1987. The connection to the regime was not a secret. The earliest editions mentioned that *ALAI* was published by *Dar Mayu al-Wataniyya*, the newspaper of the *NDP* (Springborg, 1991, p. 237; Rispler-Chaim, 1993, p. 148) and from 8 July 1982 onwards, it stated it was 'a weekly newspaper that is published every Thursday by the National Democratic Party' (*ALAI* 23, p. 18).

Popular sheikhs appeared regularly in *ALAI*. Muhammad Mitwalli al-Sha'rawi, the so-called 'father of Arab television preaching' (Brinton, 2016, p. 1), was pictured on the cover of the first issue and featured in almost every edition. Sha'arawi, was 'pushed by the authorities to defend a modernist line' (Kupferschmidt, 1987, p. 412) and 'Abd al-Hamid Kishk and other religious leaders were given 'full freedom to expound on any subject, so long as they did not explicitly question the president and his policies' (Kepel, 2003, p. 246). Between January and June 1987, Kishk and

Sha'rawi appeared weekly, the latter taking the most prominent position of the two.

The opening article of the first issue expounded on *ALAI*'s general aims. Immediately, it positions itself as a religious journal targeting a wide audience. 'We believe that religion is for living, not [only] death [...]. Therefore, we will work together with life, with the student at his university, the worker in his factory, the professor in his institute, the doctor in his treatment, the woman in her home, the child who is growing and every problem in our lives' (*ALAI* 1, p. 1). This wide audience is targeted, for instance, by including a women's section ('the woman and the child') and readers' involvement in recurring sections such as 'fatwa's: you ask and Islam answers' and 'Islamic mail.' The article continues by saying that 'we are open to every idea and every opinion, if based on religion. [...] Dialogue is our way and terrorism and killing is not.' Additionally, 'it asserts that difference in opinion is not a crime in Islam,' emphasizing that it provides an inclusive interpretation of Islam.

After the elections, *ALAI* rarely discussed politics. The first month of the new Parliament coincided with Ramadan and, consequently, religious topics were emphasized. The journal did, however, frequently respond to radical manifestations of Islam, by pointing out that these are un-Islamic. Mubarak, for instance, argues in June not to 'associate extremist groups with religion' (*ALAI* 281, p. 16). A few weeks later it is mentioned that 'exaggeration in religiosity leads to fanaticism of opinion and rigor' (*ALAI* 286, p. 19).

Additionally, the regime is complimented for Islamizing Egypt, something for which the *Brotherhood* also took credit. 'The government and Parliament pledge not to issue any laws that contradict Islamic *shari'a*' and the current Parliament is different from past ones because Islamic issues are more prominent (*ALAI* 284, p. 17). A week later, Mubarak appears on the cover with an article on 'religious achievements in the era of Mubarak.' Allegedly, religious bodies met to discuss his future candidature for presidency – a referendum on which would be held in October 1987 – and endorsed it. '*Al-Liwa' al-Islami* blesses this nomination and offers a glimpse into President Mubarak's achievements during his past time of ruling' (*ALAI* 285, p. 3).

*ALAI*, thus, occasionally covered political subjects after the elections, but these were not of primary concern. When reviewing earlier editions, however, it shows that it did respond to the political situation, but rather in the weeks preceding the elections. On 12 February 1987 a referendum was held on the amendment of the Electoral Law, resulting in the dissolution of Parliament and new elections in April. Although *ALAI* was a government mouthpiece, its editorials did not cover the referendum. In the edition of 5 February (a week before the vote), however, Mubarak appeared, preaching a moderate Islam, arguing that 'Islam does not allow for terrorism and bloodshed' (*ALAI* 263, p. 3). This enhanced Mubarak's Isla-

mic credentials, while simultaneously helping him to brand his opponents as extremists. This was a well-known tactic to delegitimize not only Islamic fundamentalist groups, but also Islamic political opponents (Davidson, 2000, p. 85).

On the day of the referendum *ALAI* again did not pay particular attention to the topic. One week later – after the results were revealed, new elections were scheduled and the Brotherhood formalized its partnership with the Islamic Alliance – it still not explicitly addressed politics, which continued to be the case until late March, when, in a short time span, the newspaper clearly politicized.

On 19 March, two weeks before the elections, the tone changed, albeit subtly, and *ALAI* began to cover more political topics. For one, a section was introduced titled ‘political issues from an Islamic perspective,’ this week covering the topic of *shura* (‘consultation’) as a political system, which is better than democracy, because it is ‘a program for the entire life. [...] democracy emerged as a form of government, not a program for life’ and ‘*shura* is more general and broader and it contains democracy.’ Overall, ‘religion made *shura* the foundation of rule; modern democracies do not achieve the [kind of] justice achieved by *shura*’ (*ALAI* 269, p. 22).

The next week covered more political topics. The elections, scheduled in eleven days, were discussed for the first time and made it to the cover, condemning a well-known *Brotherhood* tactic: ‘the *ulama* of Islam emphasize that using the mosque for the election campaign is forbidden’ (*ALAI* 270, p. 1). The *Brotherhood* traditionally used mosques for recruitment and spreading its message (Munson, 2001, p. 502; Zahid, 2010, pp. 72–73), including its political messages (Abed-Kotob, 1995, p. 330). However, ‘the mosque is for worship, not for accusations and false promises.’ The former director general of the *Islamic World League* in Mecca emphasized that ‘making a fuss in a mosque is contrary to Islam’ and ‘there are many texts in the Quran’ that forbid election campaigns in mosques (*ALAI* 270, p. 5). Overall, the practice is ‘*haram, haram, haram*’ (*ALAI* 270, p. 20).

This week’s section of ‘political issues from an Islamic perspective’ discussed ‘the multiparty [system] and election lists.’ Supposedly, ‘Islam does not prohibit a multiparty [system], on the condition that [the parties] follow the principles of *shari’a*.’ Although opinions vary among the *ulama*, ‘there is nothing wrong with people being represented by whom they choose, regardless of their qualifications, specialisms and wealth.’ Nevertheless, they preferably have some administrative experience, because ‘public affairs need experience and expertise’ (*ALAI* 270, p. 22).

The following edition came out four days before the elections and was even more politicized. Mubarak appeared on the cover, at a meeting with imams, saying ‘we make a great effort to establish a society that upholds the values of Islam’ (*ALAI* 271, p. 1). He stated that ‘the vast majority of Egyptian laws agree with *shari’a*’ and that ‘arousing unrest,’ as had been done in the run-up to the elections, is ‘an exter-

nal order' (*ALAI* 271, p. 3). 'Election traders fabricated false rumors to ignite sectarian strife' is another headline on the cover (*ALAI* 271, p. 1). The issue of sectarian strife is downplayed, mentioning that 'Muslims and Copts live in peace without irritation and disputes.'<sup>11</sup> In fact, 'there is no sectarian strife. These are false rumors caused by election fever.' The riots are exaggerated and Christians themselves even said it was not sectarian. 'They lived in peace with Muslims for hundreds of years and [even] the Muslims denounced the actions of a few villagers who were inspired by the election campaigners from one of the parties [i.e. the *Brotherhood*] that tries to spread hatred among the Egyptian people in order to get a few votes, even false ones' (*ALAI* 271, p. 4).

Further delegitimizing this 'one party,' an article on the following page mentions that 'Islam forbids the promotion of rumors [...] because it provokes sedition and hatred.' Spreading rumors is '*haram*' and preventing this from happening is the 'duty of the state,' whose responsibility it is to deter rumors that 'do not represent God's laws' (*ALAI* 271, p. 5). On that same page another article addresses the elections, mentioning that 'Islam forbids electoral bidding and distortion of the people and accusing them of injustice' (*ALAI* 271, p. 5). The days prior to the elections saw many incidents and scores of *Brothers* were arrested, which would become 'a familiar election ritual' from this time on (El-Ghobashy, 2005, p. 379). These incidents, however, were not mentioned.

The 9 April edition, three days after the elections, deviates notably from previous weeks. Elections no longer play a role and the overall tone is nonpolitical again. This remains the case for the following months, suggesting that *ALAI*'s political tone was highly pragmatic and temporary. Even the edition that came out the day after the first session of the newly elected Parliament did not cover the subject, but was concerned with the start of Ramadan instead. Hence, once the political situation settled, political issues disappeared to the background.

Overall, *ALAI* claimed to represent a comprehensive and inclusive Islam. Congruous with its opening article, *ALAI* depicts itself as a peaceful, moderate voice, appealing to its readers with popular religious authorities such as Kishk and Sha'rawi to enforce its claims. Nevertheless, it was published by the *NDP*, which oppressed any serious political opposition and was keen on delegitimizing anyone capable of posing a threat to its hegemony, including, and in 1987 prominently, the *Brotherhood*. The regime used *ALAI* as a tool to maintain and strengthen its power and the political status quo, of which the *Brotherhood* formed no part. Nonetheless, the movement was on the rise and when politics faded from *ALAI*, the *Brotherhood* took seat in Parliament and began to boast about this in its own journal.

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<sup>11</sup> Allegedly, there were 20 violent incidents against Copts between 1982 and 1991. This number rose significantly in the 1990s (Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 72).

## ***Liwa' al-Islam* and the 1987 elections**

Every month, *LAI* began with an opening article (*'al-iftitāhiyya'*). The title of the first edition's *iftitāhiyya* is 'Islam, stability and freedom' (*LAI* 1, pp. 4–5). Its tone and content immediately show that *LAI* was of a different caliber than its generally non-confrontational governmental namesake, promptly addressing Mubarak and the regime directly and critically. The article starts by mentioning that 'talking about stability, achievement and freedom was most important in the speeches of the president of the republic in the last period. While meeting members of the new Parliament he said: "stability is the first pillar of every achievement and every solution."' Although stability is indeed important, the article argues: 'we fear that stability is imposed by oppression, terrorism and violation of human rights [...].' Instead, we want 'stability that provides citizens with safety, security and tranquility,' not stability that 'deprives people of their freedom [...].' Moreover, 'we do not want "stability" to be a weapon drawn in the face of who[ever] demands reform [...] and addresses corruption and those who are corrupt.'

The article goes on to plead that 'we believe that commitment to peace is a doctrine [...] and *shari'a* is the only path towards achieving a stability that brings about prosperity.' Islam is currently in danger; 'we encounter complex problems and we are unable to face them, but with strong and honest morals, originating in deep and firm faith, dear and expensive sacrifices and great suffering.' Eventually, Islam achieves true freedom for mankind, but there is 'a difference between freedom that is determined by Islam for the people and freedom that is defined by democracy.' *LAI* presents itself as the – nonviolent – guardian of Islam, similar to *ALAI*. However, the tone of the former was immediately politicized and it vigorously reported on the *Brotherhood's* political achievements. When the movement was granted a publishing license, it was still illegal, but this did not prevent it from adopting a regime-critical tone.

Given that the first edition was issued during Ramadan, various articles appeared on this matter, similar to *ALAI*. However, there were also multiple distinctively political articles, such as 'The spirit of Ramadan and overcoming the economic crisis.' Here, it is argued that Egypt suffered from an economic crisis,<sup>12</sup> which was felt by everyone and will destroy the country if no action is taken. This will result in Egypt losing its independence, especially to the Americans, in addition to the moral crisis it causes. The state is blamed for adopting a western instead of an Islamic lifestyle, which is partly why the crisis started to begin with. The solution is simple: return to Islam (*LAI* 1, pp. 14–16).

A month later, 'the economic crisis and the conscience of the citizen' argues that the causes behind the crisis contradict the government's official view, which proclaims fraternity, freedom, equality and democracy. Many promises were made –

<sup>12</sup> The drop in oil prices in the 1980s resulted in 'drastic cuts in public investment budgets' and a drop in per capita real incomes of 8 to 10 percent (United Nations, 1987, pp. 35–36, p. 156).



bread for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, jobs for the unemployed – but what is carried out is actually the opposite. Rather, we see the spread of hunger, housing crises, poverty, misery and much more (*LAI* 2, p. 21).

*Shura* is also addressed in *LAI*, similar to *ALAI*. Both agree on its importance and argue that it contains democracy. Additionally, Islam is already democratic in nature (*LAI* 1, pp. 24–25). Nevertheless, the *Brotherhood* does not favor the concept of democracy. In June, one author argues that the fact that the *Brotherhood* takes seats in Parliament does not mean that it approves of the system. Rather, they wish to abolish all that does not follow *shari‘a* in the long-run (*LAI* 2, pp. 10–11). This gradual approach is emphasized a month later, when it is mentioned that the movement wished to win the hearts of the people first, before switching to politics. Now that the hearts are won over, the time has come to participate in politics (*LAI* 3–4, pp. 8–9).

As did *ALAI*, *LAI* also took credit for Egypt’s religious revival, but, it argues, the Islamists are hindered by the rulers. The (religious) awakening of the people is not caused by the regimes and all the Islamists want is freedom to address the people. In the end, ‘Islam is the solution’ (*LAI* 1, pp. 32–33) and only God’s rule is leading, not kings, presidents, democracy or referendums (*LAI* 1, pp. 34–37).

The opening article from June, ‘between terrorism of the governments and terrorism of the [religious] societies’ again starts off critically. This article, which provides an overview of the suppression of Islamist movements in Egypt, directly criticized the regime. It states that the movement has always been terrorized by Egyptian regimes and these past terrorist methods continue until today. After Sadat’s assassination, the new regime continued its old habit of using terrorism, arresting thousands. The article, moreover, proclaims that the *Brotherhood* is nonviolent and rejects all forms of terrorism, including government-inflicted against Islamists (*LAI* 2, pp. 4–5). That same edition this discussion continues when it is argued that the Islamic movement is being slandered. Only extremes are highlighted, providing an incorrect image of the Islamists (*LAI* 2, pp. 22–23, p. 27).

The *Brotherhood*’s motivations to participate in elections are, moreover, explained. ‘Elections on the path of *al-da‘wa*’ mentions that the elections were an important event in Egypt’s political life and for the Islamic movement as a whole. The *Brotherhood* primarily participated because it wants to implement *shari‘a* and believes that it is a leader’s duty to enforce this. Additionally, by participating the movement could take advantage of the publicity and, thus, spread its message. Moreover, participation results in valuable political experience, which will be beneficial in the future (*LAI* 2, pp. 10–11).

This motivation to participate in politics is further elaborated upon in the special section ‘Parliamentarianism.’ Allegedly, many Muslims lost their interest in religious matters over the years and a return to Islam had to be realized by a selection



of Islamists, i.e. the *Brothers* in Parliament. They came to Parliament aiming for proper morals, not merely to express their opposition to the regime. Eventually, they want to spread the *Brotherhood's* call and implement *shari'a* (LAI 2, pp. 32–33). Therefore, 'we cooperate with others' in the best interest of our country (LAI 2, pp. 34–35).

The slogan adopted by the *Islamic Alliance* during the elections was 'Islam is the solution,' which is regularly referred to in LAI. Allegedly, this was 'the slogan that scared the secularists,' hinting at the political establishment (LAI 2, pp. 40–41). This argument is repeated a month later, again pointing at the Mubarak administration. This article argues that LAI continues its campaign to show the people that Islam is indeed the solution. This is a religious duty, not just a slogan used for the election campaign, and it could help Egypt escape the suffocating crises from which it suffers, which have their roots in secularism (LAI 3–4, pp. 46–48).

In July and August, the movement celebrated its sixtieth birthday, highlighting its successes and struggles over the years. The opening article explains how the movement always positioned itself as opposition to every regime: not in a partisan, fanatic, or opportunistic way, but through an Islam-based opposition. The Muslim world was torn after the fall of the caliphate and the *Brotherhood* appeared as a new kind of Islamic movement that dealt with the European-Zionist assault that invaded the Islamic world. Moreover, ever since the days of al-Banna, it has tried to participate in politics (LAI 3–4, pp. 4–5).

This line of reasoning continues several pages later, when it is mentioned that many obstacles were put in the way of those who work for Islam, but these failed to achieve their purpose. All the repression and torture notwithstanding, the *Brothers* never gave up and even entered Parliament because of the will of the people and 'we will continue to walk along this road' peacefully (LAI 3–4, pp. 8–9). This argumentation is employed again in the same issue on a different topic. Purportedly, hundreds have been made martyrs on the path of Islamic *da'wa*, most by Egypt's own rulers. Despite all this, the movement was victorious. When it emerged, Islam was in the process of losing its importance, but thanks to the *Brotherhood* it returned to people's hearts and lives. Starting with six people and 60 years later there are 36 representatives in Parliament who form the main opposition. These elections confirmed the movement's position, as more than one million people said 'yes' to the *Islamic Alliance*, despite all the 'oppression, terrorism and fraud' (LAI 3–4, pp. 22–25).

The historical legitimacy of its current political position is further emphasized in an article on '60 years since the emergence of the *Brotherhood's* call.' Allegedly, a new period began when it entered Parliament. Yet, even though this victory is of crucial importance, the *Brotherhood's* call is not restricted to a political party, but rather an 'expression of the spirit of Islam.' It desires to reform life generally and has been doing so for the past decades (LAI 3–4, pp. 18–20).

Appearing in the immediate aftermath of the elections, *LAI* openly reflected on the *Brotherhood's* new political reality, presenting itself as the mouthpiece of a movement that deservedly fought its way into politics and into society at large. Openly regime-critical, *LAI* blamed authorities for being secular and violent, whereas *ALAI* claimed the exact opposite and, in fact, accused – what it considered to be – radical groups, like the *Brotherhood*, of not adhering to Islam. Much is permitted, as long as it benefits the Islamic call, and the recent elections indicate that this is indeed the right path. This feeling is strengthened by the notion that, had there been fair elections, the movement would have obtained even more votes. Nevertheless, the *Brotherhood* had to remain cautious, since its illegal status also made it dependent on the same regime it criticized. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that in October 1987 Parliament, including the *Brotherhood* representatives, nominated Mubarak for a second term in office (Lesch, 1989, p. 92; al-Awadi, 2004, pp. 114–117).

## Conclusion

This paper shows that Islam was a powerful tool in the struggle over political legitimacy that was waged in *ALAI* and *LAI* by both the regime and the *Muslim Brotherhood* at the time of the 1987 elections. Aside from certain differences, there were many similarities in the regime and the *Brotherhood's* views on political Islam. Both claim to have popular support and represent a comprehensive Islamic current, to strive for a fully Islamic system, including *shura* and *shari'a*, and both are ambivalent about the concept of democracy. Islam is moderate and peaceful and so are its advocates, in this case the *NDP* and the *Brotherhood*. Nevertheless, both claimed responsibility for Egypt's Islamization and wanted to take charge of this religious momentum by presenting itself as the best option, while delegitimizing the other. Furthermore, both appealed, in part, to the same religious audience, which had many shared values.

Islam was used in *ALAI* and *LAI* as a tool to obtain peoples' consent and moral compliance, and, eventually, an obligation to obey to the proposed system. In this sense, it could be argued that the shared Islamic values that were addressed were part of the Egyptian social contract that functioned as an instrument to connect people and add to the legitimacy of both the regime and the *Brotherhood*. This seems in line with Kant's notion that political authority can only be legitimate if the social contract is respected, which means, in the case of the 1987 elections in Egypt, that political legitimacy cannot exist outside an Islamic framework.

Despite its reservations, the *Brotherhood* had little choice but to participate in democratic elections, knowing that the only way to change the system was from within. Gradualism was undoubtedly part of the *Brotherhood's* political strategy, but the regime also hinted at gradually moving towards a more Islamic political system in *ALAI*. Theoretically, this gradual approach could be a strategy to, in the

long run, take full control and abolish democracy altogether, as argued by Hamid and McCants (2017). However, it could also be a way to eventually provide a free environment in which Islam could be accommodated into the political system, as mentioned by Khan (2006). Both options nonetheless require a basic level of political freedom that did not come to happen up to this day. The *Brotherhood* pursued a path of political activism in its bid for legitimacy, whereas the regime wanted to maintain the political status quo, in which it held almost absolute power. This case, thus, also underscores Roy's notion that Islamism eventually failed, given that the *Brotherhood* had to function within a political framework that turned out to be unchangeable.

These journals did not stand alone, however, but were part of a specific, and at the time unique, climate of Islamization and relative political liberalization. The *Brotherhood's* position changed drastically in 1987, but so did that of the *NDP*, which suddenly faced serious challenges. Although technically opponents, *ALAI* and *LAI* were interrelated, making similar religious claims and pushing their own agendas in their bid for legitimacy. Simultaneously, both were highly reactive. This not only shows from the journals' names, but also from their content. Performing different roles in the same media landscape both played out the political battle for legitimacy in their periodicals.

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